The Hornet Buzz
News from the Nest

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ATFLIR OPEVAL Deemed a Success

Pod is Operationally Effective and Operationally Suitable

NAVAIR PEO(T)

The NAVAIR F/A-18 program is pleased to announce the successful test results of the ASQ-228 Advanced Targeting FLIR (ATFLIR) pod, in its Operational Evaluation (OPEVAL). The fleet testers of Commander Operational Test and Evaluation Force (COMOPTEVFOR) gave the highest grade possible to the ATFLIR calling it "operationally effective and operationally suitable." In addition, the report recommended the system's introduction into the fleet.

"This is great news for the fleet," said NAVAIR F/A-18 Program Manager Capt. "BD" Gaddis. "We got the best grade possible from OPEVAL – operationally effective and suitable. In all my years in the Navy, this is one of the best test reports I've ever seen. It's a testament to the value of teamwork which is shared by all members of the NAVAIR, Raytheon, Boeing ATFLIR team."

The OPEVAL tested the ATFLIR pod in a number of tactical scenarios representing the operational environment. The purpose of the OPEVAL is to test the aircraft in a realistic fleet setting to determine its operational effectiveness as a weapon system, and its suitability to be maintained and operated by the Navy.

The majority of the testing included aspects such as reliability, maintainability, interoperability and training. All suitability critical operational issues received the highest possible grade of satisfactory. This is exceptional good news, as ATFLIR will provide the F/A-18 fleet pilots and Weapons System Operators with significantly increased combat effectiveness in the strike warfare arena.

Photo courtesy of Raytheon Corporation

An F/A-18 with full weapon load including ATFLIR.

On the heels of the OPEVAL report, the ATFLIR program celebrate another milestone, with Strike Fighter Squadron 102 (VFA-102), as Initial Operational Capability (IOC) was declared on September 8 at NAS Lemoore, Calif. The requirements for IOC were considered officially met when the program "delivered ten Block 1 ATFLIR systems to one Navy or Marine Corps squadron with trained aircrew, support personnel, maintenance support and logistical support to sustain operations throughout an extended deployment."

After a successful completion of OPEVAL the next step for ATFLIR is a Milestone III decision to enter into full-rate production, which is scheduled for October 2.

Integrated by prime contractor The Boeing Company, of St. Louis, Mo., and built under a subcontract by Raytheon Corporation of El Segundo, Calif., the ATFLIR provides Naval aviation with phenomenal increased laser designation performance and a significant leap in target recognition range.

Look Inside For ...

Out and About With The Fleet

Atlantic Ocean (Sept. 10, 2003) -- Flight deck personnel move an F/A-18 Hornet assigned to the "Valions" of Strike Fighter Squadron VFA-15 into position on the flight deck of the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). The nuclear powered aircraft carrier is conducting carrier qualifications in the Atlantic Ocean. U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate Airman Michael D. Cole.

Atlantic Ocean (Sept. 2, 2003) -- An F/A-18 Hornet launches from the USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65). The nuclear powered aircraft carrier is underway completing her Tailored Ships Training Availability in preparation for a Mediterranean Deployment. U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate Airman Jason W. Pfiester.

Central Command Area of Responsibility (Sept. 2, 2003) -- An F/A-18 Super Hornet assigned to the "Black Aces" of VFA-41 displays an American Flag during routine flight operations around USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68). The *Nimitz* Strike Group and her embarked Carrier Air Wing Eleven (CVW-11) are deployed in support of "Operation Iraqi Freedom". U.S. Navy photo.

* All Photos Available for Download at http://www.news.navy.mil

VFA-137 Certified Safe for Flight

Congratulations to the "Kestrels" of VFA-137 on their successful transition to the F/A–18E. The squadron recently completed their Safe-for-Flight certification. VFA-137 will now train as a unit and tactically employ their new aircraft bringing tremendous firepower to the warfighting team. U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 2nd Class Felix Garza Jr.

5,000th Move Without Mishap for V-3 Division Crew

USS *Carl Vinson's* (CVN 70) V-3 division reached an almost unheard-of milestone this month, when Airman Jose Almonte directed the crew's 5,000th aircraft move without a mishap.

"They didn't tell me until it was over," said Almonte, after he safely moved an F/A-18 Hornet. "I was happy and proud to be the one directing the move."

Air Department's hangar-deck crew performed the move as if it were business as usual, taking every precaution to ensure the safety of the airplane and the crew of the Gold Eagle.

Remembering 9/11

More than 100 military and civilian men and women gathered at NAS Lemoore, Calif. to remember the loss experienced on September 11, 2001. The ceremony ended with a fly-over by two F/A-18 Hornets from VFA-125 and two Super Hornets from VFA-122. As the jets flew over the crowd, one of them separated from the rest in the missing man formation and ascended straight into the blue morning sky.

Australians Unveil Largest F/A-18 Upgrade

The Royal Australian Air Force recently unveiled the largest upgrade of a F/A-18 Hornet fighter. The upgrade began seven years ago and consisted of new radar and other electronic systems. Representatives from the U.S. Navy, the Royal Australian Air Force, the Boeing Integrated Defense Systems, Boeing Australia, and the Raytheon Company, witnessed the rebirth of the F/A-18 Hornet at a presentation at the RAAF Williamtown base.

AESA LRIP Contract Awarded

Photo courtesy of Raytheon Company

An F/A-18 Hornet prepares to land. The AESA Radar is located in the nose section of the aircraft.

NAVAIR PEO(T)

NAVAIR F/A-18 Program recently awarded a contract worth $49.5 million for low-rate initial production (LRIP) of the Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar for the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. The AESA radar system is integrated in the F/A-18 by prime contractor The Boeing Company, of St. Louis, Mo and built under a subcontract by Raytheon Corporation of El Segundo, Calif.

The LRIP1 contract calls for production of eight of the AESA APG-79 radar systems. Production of the LRIP1 radar could begin as soon as next month, with delivery of the first LRIP1 radar scheduled for early 2005.

The AESA radar is part of the F/A-18E/F Block II upgrade, which includes integration of advanced mission computers, high speed data network, cockpit controls and displays, environmental control system upgrade and forward fuselage affordability improvements. AESA radar works with several existing elements of the weapon system, such as the stores management system, the gun director, and AIM-120 and AIM-9 missiles, to enhance the lethality, survivability and affordability of the F/A-18E/F.

The new radar replaces existing mechanically scanned antennas with a radar beam that can be steered at close to the speed of light. This rapid beam scan feature dramatically improves performance, and because the array is solid state, mechanical breakdowns will be virtually eliminated.

The AESA team recently embarked on the next exciting phase of flight test as it took to the skies for the first time at NAVAIR China Lake. In addition, the NAVAIR, Boeing and Raytheon team was recently honored by Aviation Week and Space Technology Magazine with their 2002 Laureate Award in electronics for their innovation in developing AESA radar technology.

The program expects the operational evaluation of the AESA radar system to begin in early 2006, with initial operational capability later that year.

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